National Drug Control Strategy

2008 Annual Report

Operation Imperial Emperor: Taking Down a Top Target

Through an international collaborative effort, DEA's Special Operations Division and 18 DEA Domestic Field Divisions transformed a single wire intercept investigation in Imperial County, California, into 160 investigations, involving 910 domestic and 18 foreign intercepts. This OCDETF investigation, dubbed *Operation Imperial Emperor*, targeted Mexican Consolidated Priority Organization Target (CPOT) Victor Emilio Cázares-Salazar, who is charged with being responsible for smuggling large quantities of cocaine and methamphetamine into the United States. His sister, CPOT Blanca Margarita Cázares-Salazar, also a member of the organization, is charged with being responsible for laundering millions of dollars in drug proceeds through the Mexican financial system. The Cázares-Salazars are also closely aligned with the Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán-Loera and Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada-Garcia trafficking organizations.

During the course of this collaborative effort, working in partnership with law enforcement agencies in the United States, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Canada, investigators were able to identify the infrastructure of Cázares-Salazar's organization and the scope of its international trafficking activities. In 2007, after exploiting almost every investigative lead, in excess of 150 search warrants were executed in the United States and Mexico, over 500 individuals were arrested, and $53.2 million was seized. For more than 2 years, the Cázares-Salazar drug trafficking organization smuggled 5 tons of cocaine and 400 pounds of methamphetamine per month into the United States from Mexico.

Victor Emilio Cázares-Salazar was indicted in February 2007 in the Southern District of California for engaging in a continuing criminal enterprise. In June 2007, Cázares-Salazar was designated by the President as a Financial Kingpin under the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act. A provisional arrest warrant was also issued for Cázares-Salazar, who remains a fugitive in Mexico. In October 2007, members of the Mexican Government initiated forfeiture proceedings against three properties controlled by Cázares-Salazar in the Mexican State of Sinaloa that are valued in excess of $5 million. As a result of *Operation Imperial Emperor*, this massive drug trafficking organization has been significantly disrupted.

Transit Zone Interdiction

Last year's *National Drug Control Strategy* set an aggressive 40 percent interdiction goal for calendar year 2007, as measured against the Consolidated Counterdrug Database (CCDB) estimate of all cocaine movement through the transit zone toward the United States during the prior fiscal year (October 1, 2005 through September 30, 2006).[1] The FY06 CCDB total documented movement was 912 metric tons, making the 2007 interdiction target 365 metric tons. In aggregate, U.S. and allied interdictors removed a total of 299 metric tons of cocaine (preliminary data as of January 2008), or 82 percent of the 2007 calendar year target. Going forward, to better align the annual transit zone interdiction goal with the Federal budget process, the goal will apply to the current fiscal year rather than the calendar year. Since the FY07 CCDB total documented movement through the transit zone to secondary transshipment countries (such as Mexico, Central American countries, and the Caribbean) was 1,265 metric tons, the 2008 fiscal year 40 percent interdiction goal would be 506 metric tons. However, acknowledging the 2-year gap between establishment of the national goal and any opportunity to request needed increases in capability and capacity through the federal budget process, the Administration is pursuing an incremental approach to the accomplishment of the goal. Therefore, the national interdiction target for FY08 is 25 percent of the total movement documented in FY07: 316 metric tons.

In 2007, U.S. and allied counterdrug forces leveraged lessons-learned and continued to optimize the use of existing resources against an ever-evolving threat. U.S. Customs and Border Protection's P-3 fleet continued to provide yeoman service despite the demands of its service life extension program. Moreover, the Coast Guard realized yet another successive year of record seizures while also breaking its own all time single-event record by

[1] It is important to note that the CCDB estimate of all cocaine flow toward the United States is a conservative benchmark, as it reflects only the cocaine movement that interagency operators and analysts are aware of and as such does not represent the total flow.